

Washington, DC – Today Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore) testified on the Iraqi refugee crisis before a joint hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittees on the Middle East and South Asia, and International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight. In May of 2007, Congressman Blumenauer authored the first comprehensive legislation to assist Iraqi refugees, the “Responsibility to Iraqi Refugees Act,” H.R. 2265. His bill was included in the FY08 Department of Defense Authorization Act, which the President signed into law in January.

“Five years after President Bush declared ‘Mission Accomplished,’ 4 million Iraqis are testament to the grave crisis that persists and the reality that our mission is far from accomplished. Last year I introduced the first comprehensive legislation to deal with the Iraqi refugee crisis. While a pared down version was signed into law, the administration continues to drag its feet on an issue that should be a moral imperative.

“It is our responsibility to help those Iraqis who have helped us, and if we don’t step up to the plate, other countries won’t either. Millions of Iraqis have been displaced, yet the U.S. has admitted only 3,435 refugees. The situation is getting worse, with Jordan and Syria having closed their borders. In the War on Terror, pretending that things are going well when they aren’t has real consequences.

“Years from now, I can imagine people pointing to the lack of a U.S. response to the refugee crisis as a turning point for a new generation of radicals in the Middle East. Going forward, just as we plan for military contingencies, we need to plan for humanitarian ones. The administration and Congress must work to address this crisis.”

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees estimates that there are 2 million refugees outside of Iraq and 2 million Internally Displaced Persons in Iraq.

The provisions included in the FY08 DoD Authorization provide 5,000 special immigrant visas for the next five years, require the Secretary of State to establish a refugee processing program in Iraq and other countries in the region, and direct the Secretary of State to designate a special coordinator at the Embassy in Baghdad.